

News From the Legislature

State Representative Ross Hunter

48th
Legislative
District



Keeping in touch

Olympia office:

PO Box 40600
305 John L. O'Brien Bldg.
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

District office:

1611 116th Ave. NE, Suite 206
Bellevue, WA 98004
(425) 453-3064

Web:

www.hdc.leg.wa.gov/members/hunter

E-mail:

hunter.ross@leg.wa.gov

Toll-free Hotline:

1-800-562-6000

1-800-635-9993

(hearing impaired)

Committees:

Finance (Vice chair)
Appropriations
Education



2005 Mid-Session Report

Spring 2005

Thank you again for entrusting me to represent you in state government. I am excited with the prospects for this legislative session to build upon the work I accomplished in my first term.

I decided to become a citizen legislator after 17 years at Microsoft because of this personal belief: Build a public education system in Washington that is second to none in the world. Fortune 500 companies operate on the premise of benchmarking against the best, with the ultimate goal of being number one. We should too.

In this fast-paced, global economy, we compete with other states to attract high wage jobs. We are fortunate to be a magnet for the aerospace, technology and biotechnology industries. Organizations like Boeing, Microsoft and Amgen attract competitive talent. Increasingly, these companies have looked out of state because our own higher education pipeline cannot keep up with demand.

The Puget Sound region has experienced tremendous growth in new jobs and families relocating to our area. While our transportation system is benefiting from the investment we authorized from a 5-cent gas tax — you have seen the nearly completed work driving through I-405 in Bellevue — our transportation infrastructure will require more investment to enable us to spend less time in our cars and more time with our families.

Before we adjourn for 2005, the Legislature must write a 2005-07 biennial budget. The challenge is overcoming a projected shortfall of over \$2 billion. I know what must come to mind — government waste and unnecessary spending. The reality is we're still experiencing slow job growth and an uncertain economic outlook. Our structural budget deficit hampers our ability to fulfill our obligations to pay for K-12 and higher education, prisons, Medicaid and rising pension rates all contribute to our \$2 billion deficit.

Over the course of the 2005 Legislative session, I will strive to bring a moderate, fiscally responsible voice to the budget process and will work with other Eastside members to push for innovative, common sense solutions to meet our challenges.

I hope this newsletter will help you learn more about my work in Olympia and encourage you to contact my office with further questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ross Hunter". The signature is stylized, with the first name "Ross" and last name "Hunter" clearly legible.

Town Hall Meeting

March 19, 2005: 1pm – 3pm
Old Redmond Schoolhouse

Topic: Budget

EDUCATION:

Building a system for the 21st Century

A lot can change over the course of a quarter century. Our current education finance system is struggling to keep up with new challenges since it was created in the late 1970s. In that time, we have established a statewide graduation requirement, seen the effects of rapid globalization and the demand for advanced degrees increase dramatically.



The time for a holistic approach to educating our children is needed. We can no longer assume that a high school diploma is enough to get by. The end goal must be beyond high school, even beyond a col-

lege degree — it is about preparing our children for a dynamic, knowledge-based workforce for the 21st Century.

Comprehensive overhaul of public education

Our public education system has received periodic tune-ups since it was first developed. But the success of our children can no longer depend on patchwork. I am leading a directive along with the Governor through House Bill 1380 to develop the most comprehensive study-to-date on early learning, K-12 and higher education funding.

The results will enable the Legislature to immediately implement solutions based on the study.

Fund education with real dollars

In a period of economic downturn, the dollars we depend on to fund public education vanish. The vast majority of state revenue comes from sales tax — a system that relies on consumption to generate revenue.

I've proposed a number of bills that create new avenues to direct more money to education and reduce the funding inequities between districts. I am sponsoring House Bill 1484 that allows county levy money to support local education and teacher cost of living increases.

The fight to bring 'Simple Majority' to the governor's desk is continuing this year. Let us hope that Bellevue, Lake Washington, Issaquah and other school districts in the state will be able

to pass levies with a simple majority of the vote. The antiquated 60 percent supermajority puts our schools at risk.

Help for our teachers

Teachers on the Eastside face some of the highest housing costs in the state. Salary cuts hit us harder than other districts. I'm working hard for both Initiative 732 and House Bill 1484, which provides for a regional cost of living bonus for our teachers.

Class of 2008 and beyond

The Washington Assessment of Student learning (WASL) has achieved one goal by raising the intensity level of involvement in education. Next year, the rubber will meet the road for the class of 2008 who must pass the WASL to graduate.

Last year, we reduced the 'high stakes' mentality of the test by allowing retakes and to bank passing scores. We are working to fulfill the overarching intent of the WASL — determine who needs more learning assistance and provide it. I introduced House Bill 2204 that creates summer school programs to provide remediation for students that need help passing the WASL.

In the end, a high school diploma will have greater value because our children will graduate meeting these high standards and be prepared for higher education and the workforce.

2005-07 BIENNIAL BUDGET:

Overcoming the deficit hurdle

Recently the state Supreme Court ruled that our estate tax law was not written correctly to deal with the federal tax changes, resulting in a loss of \$431 million. This makes the overall deficit projection over \$2 billion for the biennium. With education, transportation and health care challenges looming, balancing the budget will mean we cannot fund important programs adequately.

Governor Gregoire is expected to release her budget after the updated revenue forecast in March. My understanding is that she will try to create a budget with no new taxes.

In budget drafts I have seen children, families and the elderly will not benefit from these critical programs and services:



- Class size reductions authorized by voter-approved Initiative 728, leaving our state among the five most crowded classrooms in the nation.
- New enrollment slots for higher education, meaning many of our children won't get into UW, WSU or at other public institutions in Washington. Students from Bellevue Community College will not be able to transfer to a four-year university.
- Early childhood education programs would be reduced for young children.
- Elderly and disabled adults would lose Medicaid Personal Care services that allow them to receive in-home care.

I support the Priorities of Government (POG) approach of developing a fiscally responsible base budget from the ground-up.

TRANSPORTATION

Investing in our economic future

The transportation opportunities presented to the Puget Sound region will require federal, state and local coordination of resources and funding. On the front burner are a replacement for the State Highway 520 bridge and State Highway 99 viaduct, expansion of I-405 and I-5 improvements to reduce chokepoints, plus regional transit.

These projects are essential to maintain our region's mobility and economic vitality. Your tax dollars pay for a slice of the transportation pie. I invite your input on transportation:

Which project should receive top priority for transportation dollars?

- ☐ 520 bridge replacement
- ☐ Interstate 405 expansion
- ☐ Interstate 5 renovation
- ☐ Viaduct replacement
- ☐ Other _____



Our transportation projects need additional funds to be completed. Which of the following sources would you support (check all that apply)?

- ☐ Gas tax increase
- ☐ Increase in sales tax
- ☐ Increase in flat rate car tab fee
- ☐ Increase based on car value
- ☐ Tolls or user fees
- ☐ Tax based on car weight
- ☐ Redistribution from state general funds
- ☐ Other _____

What is the best use of transportation dollars (rank 1 to 4)?

- ☐ Maintain and repair existing transportation structures and roadways
- ☐ Expand or build new roadways to provide traffic relief
- ☐ Eliminate traffic bottlenecks (e.g. rework on and off ramps)
- ☐ Invest in mass transit alternatives
- ☐ Other _____

Do you use public or alternative transit options (bus, rail, bike, walk, carpool, etc.)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How many miles do you commute from your home to your place of work?

- ☐ Less than 10 miles
- ☐ 10-15 miles
- ☐ 16-20 miles
- ☐ 21-29 miles
- ☐ More than 30 miles
- ☐ Other _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

☐ Sign up for my E-Newsletter via email: _____

Please
place
stamp
here



Rep. Ross Hunter

PO Box 40600

Olympia, WA 98504-0600

HEALTHY CHILDREN:

We banned PCBs and DDT in the 1970s when we learned about their toxic effects to our bodies. In response to studies showing accumulation in humans, I introduced House Bill 1488 calling for a ban on a toxic flame retardant called polybrominated diphenyl ether (PBDE). The substance is found in everyday household materials such as foam, plastic and electrical components.

PBDEs present a threat to developing fetuses, infants and young children. I am concerned with safe-guarding children when they are most vulnerable and to preserve our long-term health. When safe, cost effective alternatives to PBDEs exist, it only makes sense that we take every step to protect ourselves and especially children.



TUITION WAIVERS FOR GUARD FAMILIES:

Our Washington National Guard soldiers are an all-volunteer force that put their lives on the line when called to active duty. Their self-less devotion to serving our country, state and community in times of need deserves the greatest respect and support from all of us. Often times, guard members receive less military pay when called into service compared with salary from their regular employment. To assist the families of our brave men and women, I introduced House Bill 2046 that grants tuition waivers for the sons and daughters of guard members called into a foreign conflict.



Town Hall
March 19, 2005
1 pm – 3 pm
Old Redmond
Schoolhouse
Topic: Budget



Olympia, WA 98504-0600

PO Box 40600

Rep. Ross Hunter

2005 Mid-Session Report

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U. S. POSTAGE PAID
Washington State
Department of Printing